
OLR Bill Analysis

HB 6465

AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL THERAPY.

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the Department of Children and Families (DCF), by January 1, 2014 and within available appropriations, to develop:

1. and operate or contract for a therapy program that uses animals to treat children and youths who have experienced mental, physical, or emotional trauma (animal assisted therapy);
2. a volunteer canine response team to provide comfort and relief during and after traumatic events;
3. and implement training for certain department staff on the healing value of the human-animal bond for children, value of therapy animals in dealing with traumatic events, and benefits of an animal assisted therapy program; and
4. a results-based accountability (RBA) assessment of the animal therapy program, volunteer canine response team, and staff training program.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2013

ANIMAL ASSISTED THERAPY PROGRAM

The DCF commissioner must consult the Governor's Prevention Partnership and the animal assisted therapy community to develop and operate or contract for an animal assisted therapy program that:

1. provides animal assisted therapy to children and youths who have experienced trauma and loss,
2. provides animal assisted therapy to children and youths with behavioral health needs who are in DCF custody,

3. allows for collaboration with mental health providers to include animal assisted therapy in a youth's or child's therapy plan,
4. provides interactive empathetic training activities with therapy animals to show how the human-animal bond helps healing,
5. uses nonverbal learning in trauma treatment, and
6. demonstrates positive outcomes for children. (It is unclear how you mandate outcomes.)

The bill defines "animal assisted therapy community" as local or regional entities with staff and capabilities to engage in animal assisted therapy including the Connecticut Humane Society, Soul Friends, Inc., and Animal Assisted Therapy Services, Inc.

VOLUNTEER CANINE RESPONSE TEAM

The DCF commissioner must consult with the Department of Agriculture (DOAG) commissioner, to develop a coordinated volunteer canine crisis response team. These teams must (1) consist of various handlers and dogs who have been trained and certified to provide comfort and relief to people during and after traumatic events, (2) operate on a volunteer basis, and (3) be available to provide animal assisted therapy within 24 hours of receiving notice to do so. (It is unclear (1) who will train and certify the handlers and dogs, (2) who will provide notice to the team and how it will be provided, and (3) what qualifies as a "traumatic event.")

RESULTS BASED ACCOUNTABILITY (RBA) ASSESSMENT

The DCF commissioner, in consultation with the DOAG commissioner and the Children's Committee, must use RBA to assess the animal therapy program, volunteer canine response team, and training program. The assessment must (1) determine the effectiveness of animal assisted therapy; (2) begin identifying curriculum-based animal assisted therapy as a potential best practice approach (presumably to treat children and youth who have experienced trauma); and (3) "demonstrate positive outcome measures in hopefulness, tied to resilience in the literature and other social

emotional measures of healthy child development.” (It is unclear what this last requirement means.)

COMMITTEE ACTION

Children Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 10 Nay 2 (02/28/2013)